

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: ASA 20/011/2006 (Public)
News Service No: 091
7 April 2006

India: Excessive use of force against peaceful Narmada demonstrators

Amnesty International is concerned by reports of excessive use of force by police on 5 April 2006 during a peaceful demonstration in Delhi. The demonstrators were protesting against displacement due to the Narmada river valley project. Amnesty International calls on the Indian government to immediately investigate and bring to justice those responsible for excessive use of force and to ensure that law enforcement officials use force only when strictly necessary and to the minimum extent required in the circumstances.

According to reports, the police, during their midnight action, used batons to disperse the demonstrators and took Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) leader Medha Patkar and activist Jamsingh Narghawe to a government hospital where they are being held under police guard without access to family or legal counsel. The two have now been on a protest fast for more than a week. Reports also indicated that around 50 NBA activists, who were also peacefully protesting at the same demonstration, were detained overnight in a police station.

For the last two weeks, hundreds of people from the affected areas have been protesting in Delhi in relation to the ongoing Sardar Sarovar dam project across Narmada river. The demonstrators are concerned that the recent decision by the Narmada River Valley Authority to raise the dam height by nine metres would displace a further 35,000 people. They have also pointed out that this decision resulting in further displacement had been taken even as the compensation, ordered by the Supreme Court for those already displaced, was not being upheld. According to orders by the Supreme Court, in October 2000 and March 2005, the displaced farmers should be provided with cultivable land as compensation for the loss of their former land. However, there were indications that those already displaced and to be displaced would be provided instead with financial compensation.

Amnesty International demands the immediate release of Medha Patkar and Jamsingh Nargave.

Amnesty International urges the Indian government to ensure that the right to peaceful assembly is upheld and that the police, when fulfilling their public order duties, respect human rights and use force only when strictly necessary and in a proportionate manner. The organization calls on the government to ensure that the Supreme Court orders on displacement are respected and that the rights of those displaced are upheld in full.

Background

The demonstrators were affiliated to Narmada Bachao Andolan, an environmental social movement, which has campaigned for the last two decades against the social and environmental consequences of large scale dams which have been developed as part of the Narmada River Valley Development plan.

Narmada is the fifth largest river in India and flows west over a length of 1,312 km before draining into the Gulf of Cambay in Gujarat. The Narmada River Valley Development plan is a twenty year multipurpose power and irrigation project, consisting of 30 dams including two large scale dams, which has been implemented by the states of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan.